

48 Hours 661

Chapter 661 Friday

It was Friday in the blink of an eye.

The weekend was nigh, and the classroom was in a much more relaxed atmosphere than before. Monday was the day that everyone hated the most, as if the day the students had to face down their worst enemies. Everyone just wished that they could get over Monday as soon as possible. At the moment, though, everyone was in a lighter mood, and more people talked and laughed in the front and back rows.

If one ranked the emotional values of high school students for a week, Monday was probably the day they felt least motivated since the new week was about to begin. The thought of having had to spend another five days in school was downright depressing. Tuesday was only slightly better than Monday. On Wednesday, students began to see a slight glimpse of hope. By then, they should be a lot more elated than they were since the weekend was just beyond the horizon.

Upon Thursday's arrival, many students would start thinking about where they would spend their weekend and what activities they could do. Come Friday; the weekend was finally within grasp. Their endorphins were at their highest, very much akin to the first and second days of an adult's payday. Saturday, on the other hand, wasn't as exciting as Friday. That was because the weekend was half gone, and when the realization hit them, a student's happiness would start to drop. Lastly, on Sunday, the students would enjoy the last day of the weekend, their joy diminished even further. While they enjoyed the last remnants of the weekends, they began to dread the next day since it would be Monday all too soon.

Today, Bai Qing changed into a short dress that Zhang Heng had never seen before. With her crop cut, she gave off the impression of a girl in the sparkling summer sunshine. She looked more mature in her outfit, too, instead of the regular jeans she'd wear outside. "Hmm."

When Zhang Heng came to the classroom, he saw Bai Qing looking at him. "Something wrong?" "This dress suits you well." "Thank you..." Zhang Heng's compliment had left Bai Qing abashed. She immediately buried her face in the textbook. After a while, she muttered, "You look good too."

"Really?" Zhang Heng looked at his attire and felt no different from the clothing he wore on average days.

"I invited Chi Jia to come with me. Is that fine with you?" Bai Qing asked quickly afterward, changing the topic and pretending as if nothing happened.

"It's totally fine. You can bring whoever you want with you. I invited my childhood friend as well."

Zhang Heng knew how active Chi Jia was, and if memory served him right, she lived very close to Bai Qing's house. The two would often go home together, and Qin Zhen would surely feel relieved if she tagged along. Although Chi Jia was not exceptionally gorgeous, she was prettier than most of her counterparts, probably having something to do with her active lifestyle. She was well-toned and slim, not to mention how tall she was as well. In fact, she would pair up nicely with Qin Zhen, himself a big basketball fan.

Bai Qing talked to Zhang Heng quite often, but on this occasion, she was at a loss for words after speaking only a few sentences to him.

Fortunately, the morning's self-study bell rang amid the awkward moment. The class teacher strode into the classroom, glared at all the students, and snorted, "It's not the weekend yet! Can't you guys hang on for one more day? I believe I should be handing you guys more homework this weekend."

As soon as she said that, the whole classroom erupted into groans and wails.

"If you are told to memorize words or texts, you should do it now. Stop talking to each other."

Immediately, all the students started to put on their serious looks and began studying. Zhang Heng took the workbook secretly handed by Bai Qing from below and continued to copy the unfinished homework.

Friday was probably the most chaotic day of the week.

During the second half of the last class of the day, probably only top students like Bai Qing would concentrate on the lesson. This time though, Bai Qing looked distracted, constantly looking at her watch several times.

The male physics teacher realized that no one was paying any more attention to his class. Seeing that there were only three minutes left before the class was over, everyone was allowed to pack up after he gave a few final words. When the bell rang, he shook his head and walked out of the classroom textbook in hand.

"What now? Do you know where we'll be heading to tonight?" Chi Jia couldn't sit still, even before the physics teacher asked them to pack their bags. She was already packed and ready to leave, with only a single workbook left on her desk. After the physics teacher left the class, she quickly ran to Bai Qing's desk.

After Chi Jia asked the question, Bai Qing looked at Zhang Heng.

Chi Jia pouted, "You better make sure nothing bad happens to her!"

"You'll be there with her," Zhang Heng said.

"That's what I'd like to hear. The reason why Bai Qing thrives is that she's been under my great care!" Chi Jia stretched out her hand and squeezed Bai Qing's face as she talked. "Stop fooling around," Bai Qing broke free from Chi Jia's claws and growled sternly, "I believe in Zhang Heng's character." "Oh, women. The species that ignores a similarly gendered friend once they become attached with the opposite sex." Chi Jia let out a long sigh.

All of a sudden, Zhang Heng produced two concert tickets from his pocket, "I'm sorry that I had to wait until now to tell you because I wasn't sure if I could get my hands on these."

"Concert?" Chi Jia was bewildered. She then saw the name of the celebrity on the ticket and screamed in shock. Those who hadn't yet left the class all turned toward her. "It's GEM's concert, and you even got the VIP seats?! Chi Jia, how did you become so rich all of a sudden?" someone asked.

“Get lost!” Chi Jia said, “I didn’t buy the tickets, Zhang Heng gave it...” she blurted out without much thought. When she saw Bai Qing’s flushing face, she finally realized something was going on between her and Zhang Heng. She then quickly stopped the rest of the words from pouring out from her mouth.

“I asked a ticket reseller to help me buy them.” Zhang Heng interrupted the conversation in time.

One should never underestimate how fast rumors spread among high school students. If Zhang Heng had told the others that he invited Bai Qing to GEM’s concert, the whole class would think that Zhang Heng and Bai Qing were in a relationship. It would then be followed by Bai Qing getting summoned by the teacher for a “personal talk.”

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“Still, you’re quite rich yourself, Chi Jia. Tsk... Tsk... Never judge a book by its cover.” A boy who was closer to Chi Jia teased her. “Get the hell out of my hair. What do you mean by don’t judge a book by its cover? Stop talking if you don’t know what the hell are you talking about. Do I look like a poor ass to you?” “I don’t know if you are a poor ass. I thought you spent all your money on Honor of Kings?” The boy laughed, “Where did you get the money to buy concert tickets. Chi Jia, you’ve become so rich that I don’t even recognize you anymore.” “Can you get lost? Bai Qing helped me pay for the tickets first! If I fail to pay her back, I will sell myself to pay off my debt.”

“Yes. I heard that the price of pork had increased recently.” Chi Jia was furious when she heard what he said. And she wanted to kick the boy. Fortunately, the boy ran away before she could do that.

Others gathered around her to look at the concert tickets for a while, and they all left after expressing their envy, jealousy, and hatred.

Zhang Heng saw that Bai Qing was relieved. He then picked up his schoolbag and said, “I’ll make a move first. Let’s meet at the bus station at 102-Street later.”

“Okay,” Bai Qing nodded.

Chapter 662 Milktea is Soulless Without Pearls

The nearest bus stop at 102nd-Street was located about 700 meters away from the school’s east wing. There was an old commercial street called Shanghai Market, but it had nothing to do with Shanghai, just like the standardized Qilihe across the country.

Multitudes flocked to the Shanghai Market on Friday, and Zhang Heng chose to meet here because the crowd allowed him to avoid being recognized by someone he knew.

Since he was first to arrive at the rendezvous point, he bought three cups of milk tea at the shop next to him. “Are you on a date today?” A voice came from behind him.

“Can you guys just give me a break?” Zhang Heng took the receipt and sighed.

Zhang Heng knew who was standing behind him. Like the staircase incident, the college student had been waiting for him outside the school and followed him once Zhang Heng left. Since he did not take the initiative to speak, Zhang Heng had no intention to talk to him.

Who would be the one to break the silence first?

"One original milk tea, less sugar, no ice, thank you." The college student took out his mobile phone, scanned the QR code with a smile, and paused, "This is how it works. To make sure the social system functions normally, some have to work harder than other people."

"That is the truth."

"Not to mention that we are in trouble now."

"What's the trouble? Humor me." Zhang Heng moved aside, giving way to a young couple.

The college student followed Zhang Heng to the side, too, as they waited for their milk tea to be made.

"I thought we reached a consensus at the staircase that night? We should mind our own business. It isn't right for us to stick our nose into each other's business," the college student said. "Isn't peace something you humans always promote?"

"What then? If I do that, I'll be giving you time to come up with something to screw me up," replied Zhang Heng.

"That depends on your attitude." The college student's tone was ambiguous.

Zhang Heng glared at the college student. "Where is the original owner of this body? Did he not behave well enough? What happened to him? Did you kill him? Imprison him, or try to control his mind?"

Yet again, the college student flashed his signature smile. "He has a good attitude, but unfortunately, he wasn't honest. He should have been glad that we treated him as a mental patient. After all, life is so stressful these days. Everyone complains that their work is tough and challenging. A lot of people wish that they could stay at home and play video games every day. He should have been contented with a life like that. Why did he have to go to the river, alone at night, and take something that did not belong to him? In the end, we had to retrieve it."

After Zhang Heng heard what the college student said, he glared at him. About three seconds later, the young lady at the milk tea shop said, "No. 147, who is No. 147? Your three cups of milk tea are ready!"

Zhang Heng handed over the number ticket, took the milk tea, then looked toward the college student again. "Let me guess. The reason you guys killed the three kids was to find something? And you haven't found it yet?"

The college student's expression changed slightly.

"Don't be too surprised that I know what's going on right now. If you have already gotten the thing, you won't be watching and following me all the time. Look at you. You are now working overtime." Zhang Heng said, "Before you try to pull a fast one on me the next time, it'd be better if you spend more time composing a more believable story."

The college student put away the smile on his face and said, "What happened at the parking lot earlier is a warning to you. If you don't stop coming after us, it won't be that simple the next time."

"You'd better make sure you come up with something interesting to deal with me. Otherwise, it will be a boring game for me," smirked Zhang Heng. He glanced at the milk tea shop and reminded the creature,

"Your milk tea is ready. Let me give you a piece of advice for free as well. Well, if you want to pretend to be a human, you should learn a little bit more about our culture. Milk tea without pearls is just wrong."

After that, Zhang Heng walked toward the bus station at 102nd-Street. Bai Qing and Chi Jia had just arrived, and they were looking for him in the crowd. Immediately, Zhang Heng waved to them, walked over, and handed them the milk tea he just bought.

The college student did not follow Zhang Heng again after that. He stayed at the milk tea shop, took his cup, inserted a straw into it, and took two sips from it. He then frowned and said to the lady in the milk tea shop, "Give me some pearls."

"Ah, sorry, sir. I can't add the pearls to a cup that's sealed."

"That's very sweet of you," Chi Jia said, "but I remember that you can't bring drinks to the concert."

"You are supposed to finish it before the concert starts. We still have an hour and a half left," Zhang Heng said.

"Well, guess I'll be having it now." Chi Jia picked the strawberry milk tea.

Zhang Heng then handed the chocolate-flavored one to Bai Qing. He had bought milk tea for Bai Qing before, so he knew what flavor she fancied. At the same time, he received a message from Qin Zhen on WeChat.

"My friend is here as well. Let's go there now. We can get something to eat if we arrive there early."

"Okay." Chi Jia and Zhang Heng were not familiar with each other. She was a very outgoing and active girl, never afraid to bring up a conversation with a stranger. And she could also speak eloquently when participating in a recitation contest with all the people looking at her below. On the contrary, Bai Qing, who sat next to Zhang Heng in the classroom, would usually talk to Zhang Heng from time to time. Tonight, though, she seemed a little quiet.

In order to save time, the three of them decided to walk a little further to get a taxi.

He glanced at the milk tea shop again and found that the college student was still standing there. He seemed to have paid for another cup of milk tea with pearls in it.

Chi Jia followed his gaze and asked, "Is there anyone you know over there?"

Bai Qing became nervous when she heard the question.

"No, I saw someone that looked like my former neighbor."

As Zhang Heng opened the door and entered the passenger seat, he told the driver, "Please bring us to the old stadium."

"Okay." The taxi driver started the meter and changed gears skillfully while stepping on the pedal.

As the car accelerated, the college student and the milk tea shop gradually faded away in the rearview mirror.

Tonight, traffic was in gridlock outside the old stadium. There were cars everywhere, as well as buses that were impatiently honking away. Zhang Heng, Chi Jia, and Bai Qing had to get off the taxi 200 meters away from the old stadium and walk to their destination.

Along the way, they came across tons of GEM's fans who were eager to watch the concert. At the same time, ticket resellers asked if the three had bought any tickets. Some of the more business-savvy vendors had quickly set up shop around the stadium, selling GEM's merchandise.

People flooded the plaza outside the stadium.

Since Qin Zhen arrived first, he took the initiative to line up and buy glow sticks. After that, he went to the Burger King next to him to buy his dinner. People were lining all the way outside the restaurant. He would have to wait at least forty minutes to get his meal. And he could only order whatever that was left in the restaurant.

Chapter 663: Small Matter

Sweating all over, Qin Zhen ran over with two big bags of items. Before he even got to them, he had already started complaining. "You guys are finally here! I had to run everywhere to get all these things for you. Getting here later than me is such a smart move! I think I've completely transformed into your maid."

"Didn't you start lining up very early?" Zhang Heng took a bag from his hand.

"I don't want to talk about it anymore. I met the son of a bitch who jumped the queue. The girl behind him got mad, and he had the guts to retaliate even though he was at fault. Immediately, an aunty and I went to help the girl. Both of us stood up for her, and in the end, that guy wanted to beat me up!"

"Who won?" Chi Jia asked curiously.

"Isn't the outcome obvious?" Qin Zhen said proudly. "He is a high school student and is around 1.8 meters tall. I can see that he is a basketball player and he is quite muscular as well. But then, I have always fought other kids stronger than me, which was why I wasn't afraid of him."

When Qin Zhen saw the two girls that stood beside Zhang Heng, his eyes lit up. Nudging Zhang Heng with his elbow, he sniggered, "Aren't you supposed to introduce them to me?" He then lowered his voice, "Which one is your girlfriend."

"Don't listen to him," Zhang Heng said to Bai Qing and Chi Jia. "His name is Qin Zhen, a friend of mine since childhood. He's from a different school in the city, but we are of the same age. He may like to brag, but really, he's a decent guy."

Zhang Heng then turned to Qin Zhen, "This is Bai Qing and Chi Jia, my classmates."

"What did you mean by I like to brag?" Qin Zhen sounded disgruntled. "I've always been very reliable." As he said, he stretched out his hand and grinned, "Hello, I am the captain of the basketball team in my school!"

"Awesome, I remember your school's basketball team is pretty good. They came as runner up in the high-school basketball competition last year." Chi Jia and Bai Qing shook hands with Qin Zhen, and Chi Jia quickly picked up a conversation with him.

Qin Zhen scratched his head. "It's a shame. We could have won the championship. We were clearly leading in the first half of the competition, but our center player hurt his leg and couldn't perform. The opponent caught the rebound, and they managed to score a few points after that. It was not a good day for us."

"It's okay. You'll make a comeback next time," Chi Jia encouraged.

The Burger King branch they were at was completely filled, and after the four were introduced, they found a more sparsely populated parterre near the outdoor parking lot. Qin Zhen and Zhang Heng placed leaflets on the ground, letting the two girls sit on it. The boys passed their bags to Bai Qing and Chi Jia, divided the burgers, and started devouring their meal while standing up.

Qin Zhen was so famished that he gobbled down the burger in three bites. He then took the Coke handed over by Chi Jia and thanked her. When Bai Qing saw this, she hesitated a little before taking out a cup of orange juice from the bag. "Do you want your orange juice now?" she asked Zhang Heng.

"Sure." As Zhang Heng took the cup from Bai Qing, his finger accidentally touched hers. Immediately, Bai Qing wanted to move away from Zhang Heng's finger, but she did not do it in the end. Before she could say anything, Qin Zhen's expression suddenly changed.

Zhang Heng looked at where Qin Zhen looked and saw a few boys walking towards them.

Qin Zhen gasped. "That f*cker is bringing his friends here to avenge him."

"The one who jumped the queue?" Zhang Heng asked.

"Yes. It's okay. I can settle them. Just wait for me here." Qin Zhen took another gulp of Coke and handed the cup back to Chi Jia.

Worried about him, Chi Jia attempted to throw caution to the wind. "Hey, don't act tough. There are so many of them."

"Don't turn it into a big mess. It's not a big deal after all. Just let me talk to them," added Zhang Heng.

To which, Qin Zhen shook his head. "If these people are reasonable, they wouldn't have jumped queue at the Burger King."

However, he did not go to them alone in the end, knowing well enough that he would surely be beaten up. Although he wasn't afraid, the last thing he wanted was to get beaten up in front of the two girls. It would be embarrassing, not to mention how he was unsure if it might inadvertently involve Zhang Heng, Bai Qing, and Chi Jia.

He had made up his mind that even if he were destined to be beaten up, he would not drag the two girls into his problem.

"It's him! The dude who bashed me up at Burger King just now." A boy in a blue T-shirt pointed at Qin Zhen. Judging by their appearance, they had to be quite young, and they seemed to be students from nearby universities. There were male and female among them, and the other four boys in the group now glared menacingly at Qin Zhen.

"After you jumped the queue, you swung your fist at me first," Qin Zhen stated for the record.

He was not afraid of them since he had a lot of experience in fighting with others. Usually, he would run away if he knew that he could not win the fight. However, he was here with his friends today. In other words, he could not run away even if he wanted to do so.

“We are not trying to bully you,” another boy said, “Stand up straight! You punched my buddy a few times at the Burger King just now. Now, let him return a few punches to you.”

Chi Jia was dissatisfied. “Why?! He didn’t even apologize when he jumped the queue. It is not right to come and trouble the person who tried to stop him.”

“You guys are his friends, right? This has nothing to do with you. If you don’t want to be beaten like him, stop talking,” warned another boy.

Zhang Heng, too, spoke his mind. “Can’t we just shake hands and let it slide?”

“Hey, can you understand human language?! There is no room for bargaining here!” the boy threatened, reaching out to push Zhang Heng at the same time.

But the next moment, his action was interrupted by the roar of an engine. He then saw six sports cars coming from the intersection. The security guard in charge immediately removed the obstacles that were placed at the reserved parking spaces. It made the other drivers who had spent ages looking for a parking spot to divert their anger at them. After seeing the luxury cars, though, none of them dared to say a single word because they knew their drivers had to be wealthy and influential people.

After the six drivers parked, a young man from the Bentley came out of his car and saw Zhang Heng. And he said excitedly, “Master! You are here too.”

After that, he quickly walked towards Zhang Heng.

Their sudden appearance made the group who came to teach Qin Zhen a lesson stare at each other. While they were still in shock, the young Bentley driver left his female companion behind and walked to their backs. When the young man saw that nobody gave way to him, he frowned. “Are they your friends?”

“No.” Zhang Heng said.

“Good.” The young man let out a long sigh of relief. His expression changed, snapping at the girl closest to him, “Get lost!”

The girl’s face changed drastically when she heard the young man telling her to get lost. She was so scared that she almost cried. Immediately, she looked at the boys around him. However, the group who were so previously so eager to beat Qin Zhen up hesitated. When they saw that Zhang Heng and his friends were just high school students, they did not hesitate to confront them. However, when they saw a group of rich young men approaching Zhang Heng, they knew it was not a good idea to provoke them.

At the same time, the owners of other sports cars had all gotten out of their cars. The group of university students no longer had the numbers advantage. And even if they could win the right, they would have to face the consequences that would come with it. So, they just glared at Qin Zhen and left without saying a word.

“Thanks.”

After they left, Zhang Heng thanked the young man. Although he knew that they were not exactly kind souls, they weren't people who would find unnecessary trouble. The young man acted in such an arrogant manner because he saw the fight that was about to break out between the group of university students and Zhang Heng's group. He just wanted to help Zhang Heng and his friends to resolve the problem peacefully.

"Don't mention it," the young man said. He glanced at the two girls, Bai Qing and Chi Jia, and smiled. "It seems that you have company tonight. We won't bother you anymore. You can come to our club anytime you want, and please, do teach us some of that amazing driving skills."

Chapter 664: It's All An Illusion

"Who are those people?" Qin Zhen asked after the group of rich kids from the modified car club left.

"I met them some time ago," Zhang Heng replied.

"They seem to admire you a lot. And they mentioned about wanting you to teach them something?" Qin Zhen asked curiously.

"They want me to teach them how to drift in a Santana," Zhang Heng whispered in a grave tone.

"Hahaha!" Chi Jia burst into laughter when she heard Zhang Heng's explanation. "I thought you didn't like group activities, and you didn't join any school clubs. I thought you were a rather boring person. I didn't expect you to come up with such a funny joke. It's no wonder you could win Bai Qing over."

Bai Qing blushed and pushed Chi Jia, "Stop talking talk nonsense!"

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This incident that had taken place before the concert did not wipe away everyone's excitement but instead, brought the four of them closer. Even Bai Qing, who was a little nervous before, was now back to chatty self. She began to talk about recently released movies and games.

Zhang Heng also learned that Bai Qing was a fan of Nintendo classic games, having singlehandedly completed classic titles like Super Mario, Contra, Pokemon, and Zelda.

It was no wonder she tried to finish her homework as fast as possible every day.

After the four people finished their food, the concert staff began to let spectators into the stadium. The crowd started to look for their respective entrances, and Qin Zhen passed the glow sticks to everyone. They, too, began to follow the crowd into the stadium.

The VIP area was located on the lowest floor, and they were very close to the stage now. Once they got there, they sat on stools that had been allocated to them by the staff. Qin Zhen's cousin was kind enough to get them the centered VIP seats, which directly faced the main stage.

At this distance, they could see the performance without looking at the large screen on the other side. Chi Jia began to complain about Zhang Heng not telling her about the seating position beforehand. She would have brought the power bank with her, considering how her phone's battery had less than 50% left. Now, she had to carefully monitor her usage if she wanted to take more pictures.

After the admission was completed, all the fans found their seats, and the lights were dimmed, an indication that the concert had officially commenced. Just as everyone stretched out their necks to look for GEM, Bai Qing suddenly turned and looked at Zhang Heng in the dark.

Zhang Heng was aware of that, so he turned and smiled back at her. Right at that moment, the background music was played. GEM was standing on the elevator platform, rising from the bottom of the stage, and a beam of light landed on her, making her the center of attention.

Qin Zhen and Chi Jia excitedly followed the other fans and waved the glow sticks in their hands. A sea of glow sticks lit up the entire stadium at that moment. GEM was indeed worthy of the title, Iron Lung. The moment her voice was audible, the entire stadium's atmosphere instantly lit up.

Zhang Heng had attended several concerts before. Admittedly, although some rumors had tainted GEM's reputation, nobody could deny that she was indeed a top-notch songstress. Watching her singing live in front of an audience was an experience on a whole different level.

For the next two and a half hours, all four of them fully focussed on the concert. Even Zhang Heng forgot his main quest temporarily. Putting aside the matter of the aliens, this quest allowed him to return to his high-school life. Without having to worry about homework and advancing his studies, Zhang Heng realized how much fun he had missed out on during his high-school years.

Being a teenager was simple and fun. When a teenager liked someone, they would look at the person they liked with a gentle smile. It did not mean that they had to be together, but one could feel overwhelming joy by just gazing at the person, unlike adulthood, where every action one took would be taken into account.

Of course, they thought about the future too, but the future was too far away, except for a handful of teenagers that became more mature than their peers. Most teenagers did not have a clear concept and plan for the future, where life in high-school was the summer that would never come to an end.

Most teenagers often dreamt of becoming a grownup, but once they became adults, they would quickly realize that it wasn't like what they expected. The world was a starkly different place than their dreams. Unconsciously, the most beautiful time of their lives had been all but left behind, all too soon.

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The concert reached a climax when GEM performed her single "Bubble." Released in 2012, it became a tune familiar to everyone, fourteen years after she participated in the reality show 'Singer.'

For her final performance of the night, GEM changed into a long skirt, holding a microphone in one hand and a translucent piece of silk cloth in the other. As the blowers installed on the stage blew the cloth around, it made her look like she was about to fly away from the stage.

"It's so beautiful," Chi Jia gushed in envy, "I want to be a singer when I grow up!"

"Then I'll become your agent and bodyguard," Qin Zhen waved his glow stick and croaked. He was gradually losing his voice after singing along with the crowd for the entire concert.

"No, you will beat up my fans if you become my bodyguard!" Chi Jia rolled her eyes. "I don't want to be famous for the wrong reasons."

“Do I look violent to you?” Qin Zhen scratched his head.

“You should continue to play basketball in the future. Isn’t that your favorite thing?”

“That’s true.”

The two-and-a-half-hour concert seemed to be over in an instant. GEM sang two more songs upon her rabid fans’ requests before the concert finally came to a close.

When they walked out of the stadium, it was almost half-past ten at night. The crowd was still GEM’s tunes while they tried to get on the buses to return home. Some people were trying to get themselves a taxi on the side of the road. Like a lion hunting for its prey in the Africa savannah, each kept a close eye for available cabs.

Knowing that a concert was held here tonight, more than the usual lot of taxi drivers were waiting outside the stadium. However, the number of taxis wasn’t sufficient to cover the thousands gathered in the stadium. Some unfortunate ones had to wait for ages just to get home.

Considering how late it was, Zhang Heng proposed walking for a distance before getting a taxi to send the girls home. Qin Zhen was fine with the idea, and since Chi Jia and Bai Qing lived close to each other, they could just drop-off at the same place. Zhang Heng and Qin Zhen could then walk home after making sure that the girls returned home safely.

The taxi arrived at where Chi Jia lived first. After Chi Jia got off the car, Qin Zhen, who was in the front passenger seat, winked at Zhang Heng. The latter understood and said, “I will escort you to your apartment.” Then he told Zhang Heng, “You can come here to find me later.

At that time, Chi Jia had already pulled Qin Zhen out of the car.

Only Bai Qing and Zhang Heng were left in the back seat, but neither spoke again until Zhang Heng sent Bai Qing back to her house.

Bai Qing did not enter her house immediately. She stood there, looked at Zhang Heng, and said, “Well, that... thank you very much for today. I bet you must’ve spent a lot on the concert.”

“It’s nothing. I made about 200,000 yuan from the supermarket lottery earlier.”

Bai Qing opened her eyes wide, “Which supermarket?! Please tell me.”

“It’s too late. I won the first prize.” Zhang Heng grinned.

“...”

“I just found out that you are quite capable of making up stories.” Bai Qing smiled. Suddenly, someone ran across the corridor, coming up to a unit, and started shaking the iron-grill door. At the same time, the person shouted, “Help! Someone is trying to kill me!”

Chapter 665: Who Are You?

When Bai Qing heard the voice, her face instantly changed.

As the steel door opened before Zhang Heng, a middle-aged woman stumbled into the corridor in front of him. She was in an unkempt state, with messy hair, and was in a set of pajamas and slippers. She ignored where she was running, and as a result, tripped over the steps in front of her.

"Mom, what's the matter?" When Bai Qing saw her mother falling, she instantly ignored Zhang Heng and ran over to see what was going on.

When she stood on her feet again, the middle-aged woman was trembling. The moment she saw that it was her daughter who helped her, she yelled, "Qingqing, Qingqing, your dad wants to kill me!"

"Mom, what are you talking about? Don't be afraid. Speak slowly." Bai Qing patted her mother on the back, trying to calm her down first.

However, Bai Qing's attempts were all but futile.

The moment the lady heard the footsteps sound coming from the corridor, fear devoured her once again. Zhang Heng was familiar with that stricken look on her face since he had seen that very expression on the college student's face.

"Dad?" Bai Qing called out hesitantly.

The next moment, a middle-aged man in suit and leather shoes walked towards them.

He seemed a little surprised to see Bai Qing and Zhang Heng her side.

"Dad, what is going on?" Bai Qing asked.

"Leave it to the adults to deal with. Kids should stay out of it," the middle-aged man said.

"But mom just said you wanted to kill her?!"

"Your mother is mentally unstable. I'm taking her to the hospital," the middle-aged man said casually.

"No, I am not sick! It is you who is sick! Recently, I felt that something wrong with you. I feel like you've changed a lot. You're no longer my husband!!!" cried the middle-aged woman.

When he heard that, Bai Qing's father remained.

"When I went to the bathroom earlier, your dad suddenly rushed in, grabbed my hair, and dragged me out! He had this bloodthirst in his eyes, and I knew that he was going to kill me!" The middle-aged woman hugged Bai Qing tightly. "Don't let him come close!"

Bai Qing then looked at the middle-aged man suspiciously.

"Your mother is hallucinating. I just told you that she is mentally unstable, and I am about to take her to the hospital for an examination."

Bai Qing volunteered, "Then I will go with you."

"No. I want you to stay at home. This is an adult matter, and it has nothing to do with you," the middle-aged man droned on, his requests unquestionable.

Zhang Heng could see that Bai Qing's father was the one who usually gave the orders in her family. Even while talking to his own kin, he used a command-oriented tone, one that was cold and unyielding.

The commotion caused two families on the first floor to open their doors to see what was going on. One of the men came out with a kitchen knife in his hand. "What's wrong? I heard someone calling for help," he quizzed vigilantly.

Bai Qing's father snorted coldly and looked at his wife on the ground. "Are you happy now? You have put us to shame. Stand on your feet now!"

Not only did the woman remain on the floor when she heard his order, but she quickly retreated behind Bai Qing.

"Oh, a married couple is quarreling." The man with the kitchen knife heaved a sigh of relief and then said in an affronted tone, "Don't quarrel in front of our house. Do you know what time is it now?"

"This is not a quarrel. My husband is trying to kill me!" the middle-aged woman insisted. When she saw more people around her, she felt a little more relieved, and she stopped trembling.

"It appears this is getting out of hand," the man with the kitchen knife raised his eyebrows. "I don't care about what happens to your family. Just deal with it yourself. Stop screaming." After that, he turned around and returned to his house.

On the other hand, the other neighbor who came out with the man realized that it was a false alarm. They, too, closed the door and left them alone.

So the middle-aged woman quickly looked around to see if there was anyone who could help her. And finally, she landed her gaze on Zhang Heng. "Young man, you can't leave us here alone. Otherwise, we would be gone from this world!"

"I won't leave you alone, auntie," Zhang Heng reassured politely.

"Who are you again?" The middle-aged man frowned.

"He is my classmate, dad," Bai Qing replied.

"This is nonsense. How many times have I told you not to go out with boys in the middle of the night? Didn't you say you were going to watch a movie with the girls from your class?"

"We just came back from the cinema. I was worried that it might be unsafe for Bai Qing to come home alone, which was why I volunteered to send her home after the movie is over," Zhang Heng explained without changing his expression.

"You are simply trying to sweet-talk yourself out of this mess. You really think I don't know what's going on between the both of you?" the middle-aged man warned. "You've already escorted her here. She's safe. You can leave now."

Although Bai Qing's father seemed persistent, Zhang Heng did not leave.

"You are sending her to the hospital. She still appears to be unstable. Anyway, I have nothing to do now. I can stay with her for a while."

"Shouldn't you be feeling embarrassed about how you can't see yourself as an outsider?" the middle-aged man snapped coldly. "I'm going to take my wife to the hospital now, and I'm in no mood to talk nonsense with you. You'd better not show up in front of me again, or I'll look for your class teacher in school and ask to talk to your parents."

One had to admit that this strategy was usually quite effective on ordinary high school students. After all, asking to talk to the parents was the ultimate move against a student.

Fortunately, such a strategy proved ineffective on Zhang Heng. "My parents are abroad, and I haven't seen them for a long time. It might not be easy for you to talk to them," he replied calmly.

"Heh," the middle-aged man chuckled. "You have to have a guardian anyway, right?"

"I am staying with my grandfather, but he rarely interferes with my affairs," Zhang Heng admitted truthfully.

The middle-aged man was in no mood to keep talking. He then turned to Bai Qing. "You should go home first."

"Dad, Zhang Heng is a very nice person. He is just worried about mom and me," Bai Qing retorted bravely. "Can you tell me about the conflict between you and mom? Although mom can be quite materialistic, she's always been stable mentally. And..." Bai Qing hesitated. "...you've been behaving a little weird recently."

"I just told you to not interfere with the affairs of grownups," the middle-aged man said with a straight face. "Take care of your own stuff. Just study hard, and get into a good university. This is the greatest thing you can do for this family. You are not allowed to go out with boys anymore!"

A look of disappointment flashed across Bai Qing's eyes. "Why do you guys always keep things from me. Please stop treating me like a kid! If all you guys do is bring pain to each other, why continue to live in the same house and torture the other? If it is because of me, the two of you have certainly not given me a harmonious family environment."

Chapter 666: Resolving a Conflict

Bai Qing's words made her parents fall into silence again. They didn't even notice Zhang Heng walking away for a short time. When he hung up the phone and returned to Bai Qing, her mother had finally gotten up from the ground. However, she wasn't willing to get close to her husband no matter what.

The middle-aged man stood there looking solemn, making Bai Qing seem a little helpless.

The middle-aged man snorted, "Keep an eye on your mother. I'll bring the car here."

"No, I don't want to go to the hospital!" Bai Qing's mother shouted hysterically.

The way she acted made Bai Qing believe that she must have just endured something traumatizing.

"Should we go home first?" Bai Qing hesitated.

"No, I won't go home! I don't want to stay with your dad again!" Bai Qing's mother insisted, "He is no longer the person he used to be. I can feel it."

"You are in a mess right now, and you need treatment," the middle-aged man said with no emotions. "When your treatment is complete, I will take you back."

As he spoke, he reached out and grabbed Bai Qing's mother by her hand.

But the next moment, a hand stopped his arm.

"It's better that you two calm down first," Zhang Heng said. "As you said, she is mentally unstable now. It's not good to force her to stay outside. It's better to let her stay in a hotel for a few days. You should talk to her again after she calms down."

"You haven't left yet?!" The middle-aged man glared at Zhang Heng. He tried to shake off Zhang Heng's arm with his other hand, but it was futile. The boy was a lot stronger than he thought, and in frustration, he shoved Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng, however, easily managed to stop him from doing that.

"Stop... Fighting." At that moment, Bai Qing had become most anxious. After seeing what happened to her parents, she almost broke into tears. Then, before she could even figure out how the sporadic skirmish between her parents broke out, Zhang Heng had almost started a fight with her father.

But then, before anybody could react, a faint siren could be heard wailing in the distance.

The middle-aged man's face changed drastically, and he looked at Zhang Heng viciously. "Did you call the police?"

"It's not me," Zhang Heng shook his head, "I just called my friend to tell him not to wait for me and go home first."

In contrast to the now panicked middle-aged man, Bai Qing's mother was elated when she heard the siren. "The police... are the police finally here?"

A patrol car stopped in front of them after a while, and two policemen exited the vehicle.

The chubby officer on duty asked, "Who was the one that called the police just now?"

"Me! Me! Me!" Bai Qing's mother instantly answered.

"What the hell is going on? You didn't tell us anything on the phone just now. All you told us was the address." The chubby officer wiped the sweat off his brow.

"It's my husband. He wants to hurt me. I'm so relieved that you guys came here in time!" Bai Qing's mother gushed with a solemn expression while holding the chubby policeman's hand.

The chubby policeman was left dumbfounded when he heard what she said. "Did you just say that your husband wants to harm you?"

"Sorry, my wife is a little mentally unstable," the middle-aged man quickly blurted. At the same time, he reached out his hand and took a cigarette out of his pocket. "I'm so sorry that you guys came here for nothing."

The chubby policeman waved his hands. "I don't smoke during duty. We have a body cam on us." He then looked at Bai Qing's mother again. "Ma'am, what's the matter? You can tell me everything."

"My husband has been a bit abnormal lately. It's as if he's become a complete stranger," Bai Qing's mother went on. "Not only does he look at me like a stranger, but he also speaks like someone that I don't know. And he doesn't return home at the time he used to. He even changed the clock on the bedroom wall out of the blue."

"Uh, is there any problem with changing a clock?" the chubby policeman asked.

"I didn't think it was a problem at first, but when I took it down and cleaned it today, I found something wrong with it."

"What's wrong with it?"

When she talked about it, Bai Qing's mother seemed to recall the horror she experienced when she checked on the clock. The expression on her face became tense again, and then she whispered nervously, "There... is a hidden camera within it."

"A hidden camera? You mean..."

"Yes, it's one of those pinhole cameras usually found in small hotels or an Airbnb."

The plump officer and his partner glanced at each other.

"You mean your husband installed a pinhole camera in his bedroom?"

"Yes, then I found pinhole cameras in the living room, study room, and toilets..." Bai Qing's mother covered her mouth. "I realized that my every move has been monitored!"

"Why would your husband want to spy on you?" the chubby officer asked in disbelief.

"I don't know. As I said, we've been married 20 years, and he's never been like this. He came home late today, and I wanted to ask him about the cameras. I didn't expect him to look so angry, and the moment he closed the door, he glared at me, pushed me to the ground, strangled me, grabbed my hair, and dragged me out of the house!" Bai Qing's mother lamented in agony.

The chubby officer saw that the middle-aged man's gaze had changed suddenly.

"How can you do that to your wife? No matter what happens, it would help if you'd just speak amicably. Never resort to violence!"

After hearing that, the middle-aged man did not say a word. He just stood there, staring at his wife coldly.

There was no emotion in his eyes, and he looked a little panicked in the dark.

The chubby policeman then said again, "So nothing serious actually happened here... but a family dispute?"

"What do you mean by nothing serious? He strangled me, and I almost suffocated!" Bai Qing's mother insisted while showing the marks on her neck to the officers, "I used all my strength to kick him before I could open the door and save myself. Please, you can't let him get near me anymore."

"But he is your husband," said the chubby policeman. "You said that you have been married for 20 years. Lady, there are ups and downs in a marriage. Look at your son and daughter. They are all grown-ups. Divorce is not worth it."

"I don't have such a good son." The middle-aged man glanced at Zhang Heng and snorted coldly.

"Then you are?"

"I am their daughter's classmate," Zhang Heng said.

"Do you live here too?"

"No, I live in Yibei District."

"Wait a minute. Why are you here?"

"He's here to send me home." Bai Qing, on the other side, blushed.

"So you guys are together now," the officer continued. He then turned to Bai Qing's mother again, "Lady, I think you should communicate better with your husband. If you can't solve the dispute, you can seek help from the neighbourhood committee. We'll leave first if there are no other problems. Many bad things happened today. A group of drunkards got into a fight, and one of their heads got smashed in."

Chapter 667: Can You Look Outside?

"No, you can't go. What am I supposed to do if you leave?" Bai Qing's mother held the chubby policeman's hand.

The latter was left in frustration when he saw that Bai Qing's mother refused to let him go. The most troublesome thing a police officer could ever encounter was a family dispute. Usually, they could only use words to resolve such matters, and unless one of them caused severe injuries to the other party, they had no authority to detain anyone.

He could only comfort her again. "It's okay, lady. You have already made a police report. If anything bad happens again, we will catch the bad guy this time."

Once the police officer started to comfort her, Bai Qing's mother got even sadder. "I will be dead by then, and it would be pointless for you to detain him."

The chubby policeman explained in a hurry, "No, I mean, your husband will definitely not harm you again. Otherwise, he will be the first person we will be suspecting."

The officer then said to the middle-aged man again, "Be a man and do the right thing. Can you take the initiative and admit your mistake to your wife? Write a letter of guarantee to give your wife peace of mind."

The middle-aged man frowned, but in the end, he did what the police officer told him to do. "I'm wrong this time. I shouldn't have hit you, and I will never do that again."

"Now, that's the right thing to do. It doesn't matter if you've made a mistake, but the most important thing is that you admit it and correct it," said the chubby policeman while looking at Bai Qing's mother on the other side. "Lady, do you think it's okay now?"

The latter hesitated to look at his husband. There was still a lot of fear in her eyes, "I...I don't know."

The chubby policeman almost cried when he heard this. He was still trying to figure out why Bai Qing's mother was so afraid of her husband. All his efforts to help resolve this family dispute could be all in vain. However, he had been a policeman for a long time, and he had encountered many weirder cases than this. It had all served to help him improve his patience. He gritted his teeth, then comforted her again. "It's okay. The police station is very nearby. It takes only three to five minutes for us to get there. If he wants to harm you again, call me. My colleague and I will get here immediately. Besides, he's already admitted his mistake. You should at least give him another chance to make up for it."

Finally, the woman's heart softened. "Then... Then I will give him another chance."

The chubby policeman had been waiting for that sentence for a long time. He was so excited that he almost slapped his thigh.

"Married couples should always use words to resolve all the conflicts. Never use violence against each other. Think twice before you do anything." The chubby policeman then talked to them for a little longer. After that, he used his walkie-talkie to ask when he could go and deal with the drunken fight. He wiped the sweat off his face and rushed to the barbecue stall with his colleague immediately.

After the police car left, the middle-aged man looked at his wife and said coldly, "Are you happy now?"

The latter was a little scared when he asked the question. Immediately, she hid behind her daughter.

"Let's go home."

The middle-aged man turned around, swiped his card, and opened the door.

From the beginning until the end, he refused to look at Zhang Heng as if he did not exist.

Bai Qing made an apologetic expression to Zhang Heng, and at the same time, said thank you in a low voice. It was not appropriate for her to say anything else at this time. She had to help her mother back to their house.

Zhang Heng looked at the Bai Qing's family going into the building, and an iron gate separated them. After that, he stayed downstairs for a few seconds and looked around before leaving the place by calling a taxi home.

As soon as Zhang Heng paid the taxi fees via WeChat, he received a message from Bai Qing.

[Are you home yet?]

Zhang Heng replied with a yes.

[I'm so sorry you had to see all of that.]

A while later, Bai Qing's sent him another message.

[I think they should be fine. Every family faces different problems.]

[But I don't think they have the same problem that my family has, where my father wants to kill my mother.]

Bai Qing added a bitter smile.

[How are they now?]

Zhang Heng asked after he got out of the taxi.

[It's still peaceful for the time being, but my mother insists on sleeping on the sofa tonight, alone. She still seems to be a little afraid of my dad.]

[Make sure to lock the door to your room.]

[Erm... Why? Think they will fight again tonight? If that is so, the more I can't lock my door tonight.]

Bai Qing paused and added.

[Although I'm a little tired of them arguing all the time, this was the first time I witnessed such a huge fight between them. And honestly, I didn't expect my father to install so many pinhole cameras at home. It is shocking, and this makes me feel a little uncomfortable. He is not the father that I know anymore, especially when he looked at my mother tonight. There was no love in his eyes at all. By the way, thank you for stopping him.]

[Actually, I didn't help much. Your mother was the one that called the police.]

[Ah, don't talk about it anymore. I still feel ashamed that you were there to witness the whole thing. They are adults, but they were like two kids who just had a fight in a kindergarten. By the way, I'm standing by the window now. Can you look out?]

[Sure.]

[The moon is very bright tonight, and the shadow on it is visible. Unfortunately, it is said that even the United States had stopped sending people up there. I wonder what it feels like standing on the moon.]

[You can feel the desolation when you stand on it. It is a grey world, full of undulating craters and bottomless ravines. There is no life, no sound, and weathered rocks are the only interesting thing for you to see there.]

[Well, I will just close my eyes and imagine it. I think I can imagine the way you describe the moon to me. It's really amazing. It's like being on the moon right now. You can consider becoming a novelist in the future.]

[Sounds like a plan.]

While chatting with Bai Qing, Zhang Heng opened the door with the key. It was now midnight, and grandpa had already returned to his bedroom. However, he still left the light on in the living room for Zhang Heng.

Zhang Heng got out of his shoes, brushed his teeth, washed his face quickly, and went to his bedroom in slippers.

However, instead of sleeping, he took out another pair of sneakers and sportswear that he bought from under the bed.

He then poured out all the textbooks and workbooks in the schoolbag, replacing them with things he thought could come in handy, especially a pile of unassembled Lego bricks. After that, he waited for a while to confirm that his grandpa had fallen asleep again if he woke him up just now. And finally, he crept into the living room again and opened the door.

Although Zhang Heng did not know what happened to Bai Qing's parents, he was certain that the previous fight was not the end but just the beginning. A follow-up event would most likely happen later, which was why he asked Bai Qing to lock the door.

Bai Qing was obviously more worried about her parents than herself. So Zhang Heng felt that it was not safe to leave her alone. Besides, he was also curious about how the story would develop.

Chapter 668: Dream

Zhang Heng drove his grandfather's car and headed back to Bai Qing's neighborhood.

He found a building on the street where it allowed him to observe her house. He parked his car, turned off the engine, pulled out the key, and walked to a spot out of the CCTV's range. Now, all he could do was wait.

This was also the most boring and dreary part of the quest. Even if nothing happened, Zhang Heng could not close his eyes to rest or leave the place for the time being. He was, fortunately, well prepared for a situation like this. He leaned over to the back seat and grabbed his tablet. Earlier, he had downloaded a few shows that he had been following and some short movies as well.

Zhang Heng clicked on an old anime, Penguindrum, and continued from the sixth episode. As the flick played on, he would periodically glance at Bai Qing's house.

From the previous conversation, Zhang Heng knew that Bai Qing's family lived on the sixth floor. The north window should be Bai Qing's bedroom, and one on the west had to be the living room. As of now, her house was completely dark.

Bai Qing typically went to bed at 11 o'clock. Since so much happened tonight, she waited until Zhang Heng had gotten home, and the two had chatted on WeChat for about half an hour before they bid each other goodnight.

Zhang Heng seemed to see Bai Qing curling up on the bed, tapping her cellphone in the dark bedroom. The blue light from the screen was shining on her face...

While watching the thirteenth episode of Penguindrum, Zhang Heng realized that his tablet's battery was almost empty. Hence, he tossed the device back to where it used to be, stretched his back, and loosened his muscles and bones.

So far, nothing out of the ordinary seemed to be going on in Bai Qing's house. Zhang Heng then looked at his watch. It was 2:55 in the morning, and the street was devoid of people. The whole city was at a standstill, not much different from the dystopian city in the "Silent Hill" game.

As the clock ticked, his eyes were getting drier and drier, and Zhang Heng dripped in two drops of eye drops into his eyes. At 3:20, he saw a stray dog searching the trash can on his right side. Come 3:45, he shifted himself, lowered down his seat, and leaned back.

Initially, he just wanted to take a quick nap, but he did not expect to feel sleepy after closing his eyes. When Zhang Heng opened his eyes again, he found out that he was no longer in the car but was standing in a small town instead.

'Is this a dream?'

Suddenly, Zhang Heng remembered the dream he had not long ago where those things beside the river surrounded him. This time around, it looked like he had been brought back to the past, and his surroundings seemed familiar as well.

However, Zhang Heng did not remember if he had been to this town, whether in reality or in the game. There was no doubt that this was a coastal town. The strong smell of fish in the air disgusted him, and a long sandy path could be seen under the wave breaker. On top of it were a few shacks and fishes lined up beside them.

Zhang Heng also noticed a white bell tower made of bricks and stones, with a river flowing underneath not far from him. On the other side of the wave breaker, a black line loomed between the waves, reeking with an evil aura.

In fact, the whole town was shadowed by an uncomfortable atmosphere. Although many buildings and houses were being built at the center of the town, most were in a dilapidated state. Their roofs had caved in; their walls, rotting. Abandoned railroad tracks by the street were overgrown by grass on both sides.

Judging by the architecture of the buildings, Zhang Heng figured that he was probably in a western country, circa the late 19th or early 20th century. The presence of evil loomed within the town, or to be more precise, this small town seemed to be under some sort of curse. Even the sky was marred by a suffocating haze.

Since Zhang Heng was gradually losing his emotions, he wasn't affected by his surroundings. Instead, he had a faint feeling that he was visiting his friend.

This made him feel a little strange.

Zhang Heng walked down the cobblestone path and came to a square. Although there were incandescent lamps nearby, they were not bright enough to illuminate the place. Standing underneath these dim lights was a depressing experience.

On the way, Zhang Heng saw a few dirty fishermen standing on the wave breaker. After that, he did not see anyone else until he came to the square where he saw an old man walking towards a factory.

Zhang Heng greeted him in English, but the other party did not respond.

He did not look back until Zhang Heng put his palm on his shoulder.

The old man had a deformed and awful face. His head was small and flat; his nose collapsed, and his eyes protruded from their sockets. With a neck covered with wrinkles, he was bald, and his skin covered in scabs.

The old man croaked, in a hoarse, sharp, and guttural voice, "Are you... finally here?"

Zhang Heng wanted to ask him what it meant, but the next moment, the weird dream ended abruptly. It seemed as if it only lasted a second.

Then Zhang Heng heard a scream. When he looked up, he saw that Bai Qing's house's living room was lit up again. If he wasn't wrong, Bai Qing was the one screaming right now. Zhang Heng looked at his watch and saw that it was 4:47 in the morning. He could not help but curse himself.

He now had full control over his body and mind, and although he was exhausted from fighting all night, he couldn't lie down and fall asleep immediately, having not the intention to do so. Therefore, the dream that he had just now was definitely abnormal. He wasn't sure, however, if the dream had something to do with his real-life or the alien in this game.

He did not have time to check his body, so he rushed out of the car, closed the door, sprinted across the green zone, climbed over the iron fence, and jumped into where Bai Qing lived.

His short nap had apparently disrupted his previous plan to a certain extent.

But since Bai Qing still had time to scream, Zhang Heng knew that she was at least safe for now. Her screams were loud, and many families living upstairs and downstairs had turned on their lights, especially the two families living on the first floor. They were so appalled by the noise that they had rushed out of their houses again. Thus, Zhang Heng took the opportunity to enter the building.

He ran up the steps to the sixth floor.

Initially, he planned to enter Bai Qing's house through the window, but unexpectedly, the door was open.

After seeing the scene in the house, Zhang Heng could understand why Bai Qing screamed.

The living room looked like a slaughterhouse now.

Bright red blood spattered all over the walls and the floor. And Bai Qing's mother, whom Zhang Heng saw downstairs earlier, was lying in a pool of blood. Her lower abdomen had been stabbed multiple times by a knife, and her whole stomach had been cut open. She had stopped breathing due to the extremely serious injury; the fear in her eyes, permanently frozen at the moment when she was slaughtered.

In the middle of the living room, her husband, who had lived with her for 20 years, was standing in front of her body, with bloodstains all over his body. And he was holding a fruit knife in his right hand.

Chapter 669: Little Test

Unlike the frightened neighbors, Zhang Heng immediately rushed into the house to protect Bai Qing. The middle-aged man in the middle of the living room, however, did not seem to have any intention to harm his daughter. After killing his wife, he seemed to have exhausted all his strength, merely standing there without saying a word. He didn't resist, and neither did he plan to flee.

Someone had hastily called the police, and soon, a team of police officers swarmed the house came. The chubby officer, however, was not among them. After learning about the situation, the police put Bai Qing's father in the patrol car and hurriedly sealed off the scene while conducting a simple preliminary investigation. For more evidence, they would have to wait for the forensic team to arrive.

Meanwhile, Zhang Heng accompanied Bai Qing to the police station to get her statement recorded.

She was the daughter of the victim and suspect and the key witness in this murder case. Undoubtedly, Bai Qing was clearly still shell-shocked. It was an undisputed fact that anybody who had witnessed their father killing their mother would be traumatized for a long time.

Zhang Heng could feel Bai Qing's body trembling all the time. She was on the verge of collapsing, unable to even hold the paper cup the policeman had handed her. The cup fell to the ground, and the tea inside it spilled all over the place. Considering her situation, it would be difficult for the police to get a statement out of her, so they decided to let the terrified girl take a break and placed a female officer to comfort her.

Bai Qing showed no improvement. It wasn't until Zhang Heng lowered his head and said something in her ear that she finally got better. Although still shaking, she could finally speak. At that moment, Bai Qing's grandparents had also rushed to the police station after receiving a notice from them.

Since Bai Qing hadn't reached 18 yet, a guardian was required to be with her while making her statement. As for Zhang Heng, he was not allowed to be with her. So, he did not stay, quietly leaving while everyone was busy and distracted.

An hour later, Bai Qing rejected her grandpa's proposal to take her home first. The elderly gentleman had no choice but to get her a room at the express hotel near the police station.

They, too, were in a rut at the moment—their daughter-in-law had been killed, and all evidence pointed to their son being the murderer. The authorities had rejected their request to visit him, not to mention they now had to deal with their angry relatives at the same time. After sending Bai Qing to the express hotel and confirmed that she wasn't suicidal, they could only respect her decision and let her be alone for a while.

Bai Qing sat alone in the dark room.

Everything that happened to her so far was so sudden, so horrific, that she didn't realize what happened that night until now. She had lost both parents at the same time, the only people in the world that loved her unconditionally.

Although Bai Qing was tired of them arguing day and night, it was undeniable that their blood flowed within her veins. From now on, she would never get to see the woman who always shopped for facemasks on WeChat—the woman who would make her sweet and sour pork ribs and watch her eat it with a smile was now all but gone forever. The man who always looked serious and had no other care in

the world, but his business was now gone too. Whether she liked it or not, she would always get to see her father every morning sitting next to the table.

One of them had left this world, and the best outcome for her father was to perhaps spend the rest of his life in prison. Bai Qing covered her face with her hands; her tears streamed down her face uncontrollably.

From that moment on, her life had just taken a 180-degree turn, and her future was filled with despair.

Just when Bai Qing was crying bitterly in the dark, someone knocked on her door.

Zhang Heng's voice came from outside, "It's me."

His voice was like a faint light shining into her bleak and cold world, giving her the slightest bit of hope in a hopeless world. The future, however, still did not look too bright for her.

But as for those who fell into the water, they would hold on tightly to any straw extended to them, no matter how thin. Bai Qing did not bother to wipe off the tears on her face before she opened the door for Zhang Heng.

"I haven't sent you a WeChat message to tell you where I live. How do you know that I am in this room?"

"If I failed to find out which room you are in, I'm definitely not qualified to stick my nose into your problem," Zhang Heng said calmly. He then took a tissue and handed it to Bai Qing, "wipe away your tears. We have something important to do later."

"When you were at the police station, you told me that you didn't think my father was the murderer?" Bai Qing asked with tears still welling up her swollen eyes.

"Yes." Zhang Heng nodded.

"When I turned on the light, I saw him standing there with a knife. And I also asked the police officers who were in charge of this case. They told me that my father was high on the suspect list, and although they didn't directly pin him as the murderer, I don't think there's anything left for them to investigate."

"At the crime scene, there was no other suspect there. Your father was the only one holding the knife, and his body was covered in blood. And I bet the follow-up investigation will prove that the blood on his clothes came from your mother. An experienced criminal investigator would quickly conclude that your father has to be the murderer."

"So, why then would you say that my father isn't the one?"

"That's a little hard to explain," Zhang Heng said. "And we need to do a little test before I begin."

While talking, he took out a pair of Oath Rings, a piece of parchment paper, and a knife from his pocket.

[Name: Oath Ring]

[Grade: F]

[Function: Bearer will know if the other party breaks an oath]

"Initially, I wanted to use this on Qin Zhen and ask him to investigate this matter for me. That is because he is the person I am most familiar with and my most convenient confidante within this quest. But then I discovered that the method has loopholes," Zhang Heng went on saying. "It doesn't matter anymore. It will be fine if I use it temporarily."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Stretch out your hand," Zhang Heng said, "It might hurt a little bit."

"What?" Bai Qing asked, doubtful, but she stretched out her hand anyway.

Zhang Heng then put one of the Oath Rings on Bai Qing's finger. After that, he cut her index finger with a knife, caught the blood with a disposable cup, and then cut his own finger. Once their blood was mixed, he wrote, 'I swear that I will not lie from now on' on the parchment.

"Is that all?"

"Mhmm," Zhang Heng nodded. "I will ask you two questions first. First, did you know if this tragedy would happen tonight?"

"Of course not."

"Are you here to mess with me?"

"What does that mean?" Bai Qing frowned.

"Okay, congratulations on passing the test," Zhang Heng said while taking off the ring from Bai Qing's finger. "This proves that the person in front of me now is indeed who she is; until you leave my sight at least."

"Look. What's going on? What does this have anything to do with the thing that happens tonight?"

"Are you willing to believe me?" Zhang Heng looked into Bai Qing's eyes. "Because what I'm about to tell you next is a bit crazy."

"Do I have any other choice besides believing you now?"

"Okay, I will try to summarize everything for you."

Chapter 670: Upgraded Means

"...you mean aliens have invaded our world, and that they're masquerading as humans by secretly replacing our friends and relatives with themselves? And, our relatives and friends may no longer be the people we know?" Bai Qing's eyes widened. Although she said she would believe everything Zhang Heng said, as an ordinary person with a respectable IQ, common sense, and nine years of compulsory education, she found it really hard to believe upon hearing it for the first time.

"Yes. You told me that it was abnormal that your dad be home right after work. And he was also looking at the old photo album alone in the room? That's when I thought that the alien must've replaced your father secretly," Zhang Heng said. "The way your mother acted last night was very similar to the victim that I met before. It was so uncannily similar that I started to have doubts about her. I know those

creatures were trying to figure out a way to get rid of me. However, I didn't rush to a conclusion. Instead, I went home, took some equipment, and drove back to where you live."

"You were here last night?"

"Yes, I arrived at about 12:48, and I parked my car right outside your apartment. While waiting in the car, I fell asleep for a while." Unsure if it would be related to this quest, Zhang Heng did not tell Bai Qing about his dream.

"According to your deduction, the person who got replaced in my family should be my father, right? Since my mother found the abnormality, my father—that... thing—killed my mother?"

"No, as far as I know, those creatures have always been very cautious except for the case of the three children drowning. After that, they didn't resort to killing anymore. In fact, I discovered that they prefer to use the rules of society to achieve their goals.

"Take the college student as an example. They created an illusion that the target was mentally unstable through continuous psychological oppression. The student used a knife to cause chaos in the community before. Once the people around him accepted that he is mentally unstable, those creatures would be able to send him to a mental hospital without making up anything about him. And this time, the methods that they use have evolved."

"What do you mean?"

"During the last quarrel between your father and your mother, your mother deliberately spoke loudly to alert those living around her. By doing that, the other people and the police would know that your father had the intention to harm your mother. This series of actions directly correlated to what would happen later. When your mother died in the living room lying in a pool of her own blood and your father was found with a fruit knife, nobody would believe he wasn't the killer no matter what he said. I should have realized that. In fact, it is an upgraded version of the incident where the college student was found holding a knife."

"But the person who behaved abnormally before was indeed my father, and he is also the one that installed those pinhole cameras in the house. How do you explain that?"

"Your father discovered that your mother was behaving abnormally. After all, no matter how much they quarreled, they were still a married couple who had lived together for 20 years. When your father looked through the old photos, he might have suspected that your mother was cheating on him. He must have looked at those old photos because he wanted to remember the feelings he had towards your mother. Those pinhole cameras served to catch your mother cheating on him red-handed. This is how a normal person would react. When he decided to come home from work, he was trying to save the marriage. It explains why they had such a huge fight last night. When the police arrived, however, your father kept quiet about the cause of the conflict."

Bai Qing thought for a while, "It looks like your deduction is starting to make sense. My father is the kind of man that puts saving face as a priority. If he suspects that my mother is cheating on him, he would be sure to keep it from any outsiders. But... I saw him standing there with a fruit knife in his hand."

"As long as the person was well-planned, it is easy to make your father the number one suspect. For example, when your dad saw your mom attempting suicide, he would surely have run to her and snatched the fruit knife away. Either your mother managed to act swiftly, or she was simply strong enough to kill herself. In the end, your father took the knife from her. It just happened that you were there to witness the final scene," Zhang Heng said. "Of course, this is only my speculation. I need to investigate further."

"So that creature sacrificed itself to send my dad to prison?"

"I don't think they sacrificed themselves. We don't know much about them. We don't know what they are, the methods they use to replace us, and what their survival conditions are," Zhang Heng analyzed. "Maybe our physical bodies are like clothes for them. Perhaps they could dispose of it whenever they want."

"Have you been investigating this for a long time? You always look like you didn't get enough sleep in class. Has this been the reason?" Bai Qing asked.

"Yes, I've been tracking the whereabouts of the college student and investigating the drowning of the three children," Zhang Heng admitted.

"Why? You said that you are not that close with the college student, and those things have warned you. Why take the risk?"

"Well... I come from the Association of Prevention and Control of Invasion of Alien Species. It specializes in handling abnormal phenomena," Zhang Heng lied, using the name of Shen Xixi's organization as an excuse.

"It sounds like a mysterious organization that only appears in novels and movies. Is there anyone in this association besides you?"

"Yes, but they are not here. They have other things to deal with, which means we can only rely on ourselves."

"Sorry, I'm trying very hard to keep up with you, but..." Bai Qing grabbed her head. "It sounds absurd. You're telling me that aliens have invaded us, and my mother is actually not my mother..."

"It's okay. Take your time to understand the whole thing. I know how upset you must be right now, and you can either stay here to rest or go to your grandpa's place. Leave the investigation to me," Zhang Heng said.

"No, I'll come with you!" Bai Qing insisted. "Don't leave me alone." She reached out and grabbed Zhang Heng's hand. "The horrible scene in the living room keeps popping up in my mind over and over again. It's like an awful nightmare. I can't rest. If what you said is true, can we get my mother back?"

"It is possible, but I must say that the probability is very slim. First, we need to find a way to help your dad."

"If we can prove that my dad is not the killer, I'm willing to do anything to clear his name," Bai Qing proclaimed without hesitation.

"Okay, let's start with the corpse and see if we can find anything," Zhang Heng said.